You Asked

Is the parallelism used a form of metonymy or some other literary device?

Perplexity pplx_alpha

This is a genuinely rich rhetorical question that deserves a precise answer. The parallelism in Ephesians 5:18 is not a single figure but a layered convergence of several classical devices working simultaneously. Here is the breakdown:

The Primary Device: Antithesis (with Antithetical Parallelism)

The governing figure is **antithesis** (ἀντίθεσις) — the pairing of contrasting ideas within a balanced grammatical structure for emphasis. The clause runs exactly: *"Do not be drunk with wine [negative command] … but be filled with the Spirit [positive command]."* The conjunction *ἀλλά* ("but") is the classic Greek signal of antithesis, setting the two imperatives in direct opposition.[0][1][2]

This antithesis is simultaneously an example of **antithetical parallelism** — a structural pattern deeply embedded in both Hebrew wisdom literature (Proverbs, Psalms) and Hellenistic Greek rhetoric. The two clauses are grammatically parallel (both are present passive imperatives) while semantically opposed: one describes being governed by wine; the other describes being governed by the Spirit. Paul deploys antithetical parallelism pervasively throughout Ephesians — light/darkness (5:8), old man/new man (4:22–24), foolish/wise (5:15–17).[3][4][5][6]

A Simultaneous Device: Synecdoche and Metonymy

Here is where the question gets finely nuanced. Both synecdoche and metonymy are present, and scholars have specifically identified them:

- **Synecdoche** (ὀλιγωρία): The REV Commentary specifically notes that "wine" in 5:18 functions as **synecdoche of the species** — wine stands for all intoxicants, extending the prohibition to any substance that produces the controlled/dominated state. The part (wine) represents the broader class (all intoxication).[7]
- **Metonymy**: The broader structural parallel functions metononymically in both directions. "Wine" is a **metonym for the experience of being under its dominance** (the cause stands for the effect — the drink for the intoxicated state). Correspondingly, "Spirit" stands metonymically for the full

experience of being permeated, carried, and directed by divine power. Neither clause is talking primarily about a substance; both are talking about the *state of being controlled by an agent*.[8][9]

The distinction matters: in strict terms, **metonymy** substitutes a closely associated word for the thing itself (wine → drunken control; Spirit → divine filling/governance), while **synecdoche** uses the part for the whole. In Eph. 5:18, the synecdoche operates on the word *wine*, and the metonymy operates on the experiential *state* that wine/Spirit respectively produce.

The Deeper Device: Synkrisis (Rhetorical Comparison by Contrast)

At the macro-rhetorical level, classical scholars of Pauline rhetoric identify the overarching device as **synkrisis** (σύγκρισις) — a formal Greco-Roman rhetorical device of comparative contrast, standard in the rhetorical handbooks (*progymnasmata*). Synkrisis does not merely set two things in opposition; it *evaluates* them, implicitly ranking the second as superior to the first. Paul's synkrisis here argues: *the spirit-possession offered by Dionysiac wine is a debased counterfeit of the real divine filling offered by the Holy Spirit*. Ben Witherington specifically notes Paul's use of this device for moral exhortation — comparing the old life against the new.[10][11][12][13][14]

The Summary of Devices at Work

Device	Where It Operates	Effect
Antithesis	The whole verse (*mē…alla*)	Grammatical opposition: prohibition vs. command[0][1]
Antithetical parallelism	Parallel passive imperatives	Structural balance that intensifies the contrast[3][4]
Synecdoche	"Wine" = all intoxicants	Broadens the prohibition beyond grape wine alone[7]
Metonymy	Wine/Spirit → states of control	Cause-for-effect: the substance represents the dominated state it produces[8][9]
Synkrisis	The macro-rhetorical frame	Evaluative comparison: Dionysiac spirit-filling vs. Holy Spirit filling, ranking the latter as superior[10][15][12]

So metonymy is definitely present, but it is not the primary device. The primary device is **antithesis** (structured as **antithetical parallelism**), operating within a broader **synkrisis**. The metonymy and synecdoche are embedded at the word level within that larger antithetical frame. Together they create a verse of remarkable rhetorical compression — one sentence accomplishes the work of prohibition, comparison, evaluation, and positive command simultaneously.

This is a genuinely rich rhetorical question that deserves a precise answer. The parallelism in Ephesians 5:18 is not a single figure but a layered convergence of several classical devices working simultaneously. Here is the breakdown:

The Primary Device: Antithesis (with Antithetical Parallelism)

The governing figure is **antithesis** (ἀντίθεσις) — the pairing of contrasting ideas within a balanced grammatical structure for emphasis. The clause runs exactly: *"Do not be drunk with wine [negative command] … but be filled with the Spirit [positive command]."* The conjunction *ἀλλά* ("but") is the classic Greek signal of antithesis, setting the two imperatives in direct opposition.[0][1][2]

This antithesis is simultaneously an example of **antithetical parallelism** — a structural pattern deeply embedded in both Hebrew wisdom literature (Proverbs, Psalms) and Hellenistic Greek rhetoric. The two clauses are grammatically parallel (both are present passive imperatives) while semantically opposed: one describes being governed by wine; the other describes being governed by the Spirit. Paul deploys antithetical parallelism pervasively throughout Ephesians — light/darkness (5:8), old man/new man (4:22–24), foolish/wise (5:15–17).[3][4][5][6]

A Simultaneous Device: Synecdoche and Metonymy

Here is where the question gets finely nuanced. Both synecdoche and metonymy are present, and scholars have specifically identified them:

- **Synecdoche** (ὀλιγωρία): The REV Commentary specifically notes that "wine" in 5:18 functions as **synecdoche of the species** — wine stands for all intoxicants, extending the prohibition to any substance that produces the controlled/dominated state. The part (wine) represents the broader class (all intoxication).[7]
- **Metonymy**: The broader structural parallel functions metononymically in both directions. "Wine" is a **metonym for the experience of being under its dominance** (the cause stands for the effect — the drink for the intoxicated state). Correspondingly, "Spirit" stands metonymically for the full experience of being permeated, carried, and directed by divine power. Neither clause is talking primarily about a substance; both are talking about the *state of being controlled by an agent*.[8][9]

The distinction matters: in strict terms, **metonymy** substitutes a closely associated word for the thing itself (wine → drunken control; Spirit → divine filling/governance), while **synecdoche** uses the part for the whole. In Eph. 5:18, the synecdoche operates on the word *wine*, and the metonymy operates on the experiential *state* that wine/Spirit respectively produce.

The Deeper Device: Synkrisis (Rhetorical Comparison by Contrast)

At the macro-rhetorical level, classical scholars of Pauline rhetoric identify the overarching device as **synkrisis** (σύγκρισις) — a formal Greco-Roman rhetorical device of comparative contrast, standard in the rhetorical handbooks (*progymnasmata*). Synkrisis does not merely set two things in opposition; it *evaluates* them, implicitly ranking the second as superior to the first. Paul's synkrisis here argues: *the spirit-possession offered by Dionysiac wine is a debased counterfeit of the real divine filling offered by the Holy Spirit*. Ben Witherington specifically notes Paul's use of this device for moral exhortation — comparing the old life against the new.[10][11][12][13][14]

The Summary of Devices at Work

Device	Where It Operates	Effect
Antithesis	The whole verse (*mē…alla*)	Grammatical opposition: prohibition vs. command[0][1]
Antithetical parallelism	Parallel passive imperatives	Structural balance that intensifies the contrast[3][4]
Synecdoche	"Wine" = all intoxicants	Broadens the prohibition beyond grape wine alone[7]
Metonymy	Wine/Spirit → states of control	Cause-for-effect: the substance represents the dominated state it produces[8][9]
Synkrisis	The macro-rhetorical frame	Evaluative comparison: Dionysiac spirit-filling vs. Holy Spirit filling, ranking the latter as superior[10][15][12]

So metonymy is definitely present, but it is not the primary device. The primary device is **antithesis** (structured as **antithetical parallelism**), operating within a broader **synkrisis**. The metonymy and synecdoche are embedded at the word level within that larger antithetical frame. Together they create a verse of remarkable rhetorical compression — one sentence accomplishes the work of prohibition, comparison, evaluation, and positive command simultaneously.